

US EPA ORD Research Triangle Park Animal Care and Use Program Adoption Policy History

The US EPA uses animals in research.

It is incumbent on each research institution including the US EPA to ensure that the final disposition of their research animals is humane and ethical.

While euthanasia may be required for scientific purposes, at the end of some experiments some animals are completely healthy with a good natural lifespan ahead of them. Euthanizing these animals is neither humane nor ethical if other options, such as adoption to a private owner, could be available.

It is common practice across the animal research industry including government, industry and academic institutions to adopt out animals who are viable candidates for life outside the lab. The US EPA is behind the curve in instituting this practice. *

The ORD RTP Animal Resources Program Office (ARPO) has been advocating for an adoption program since roughly 2017, with a formal written draft policy submitted to the OGC in December of that year. There has been no response to the draft policy, nor updates from the OGC when inquiries have been made by the ARPO via NHEERL or ORM management.

Most public attention on ORD research animals has been focused on ORD's rabbits.

The first animal rights campaign involving the ORD rabbits was a misinformation campaign run by White Coat Waste (WCW). The billboards and social media for the campaign featured a picture of a white bunny behind bars and the words, "She breathes diesel fumes. You pay the tax bill." WCW's stance is that data from animal research does not translate well to human health concerns and therefore research performed by a Federal Agency using animals is a waste of taxpayer funds.

ORD has a population of 8 rabbits: Jasper, Tex, Doc Holiday, Johnny Ringo, Trixie, Daisy, Leo and Wyatt. These rabbits are used only to produce sperm cells for in vitro reproductive toxicology testing, a new approach method, or NAM, substituting cells for both human and rodent exposures. The bucks make the cells and the does encourage them to voluntarily donate those cells.

The bunnies are never exposed or tested in any way and each rabbit serves EPA research for years.

Currently, the ORD bunnies are beneficiaries of a "Retire in Place" policy until an adoption process can be instituted. When they can no longer produce sufficient viable sperm for scientific use or successfully encourage the boys to do so, they are retired from duty but continue to live in the vivarium. They continue to receive daily animal husbandry and veterinary care, socialize in the vivarium bunny playroom, eat hay and fresh vegetables, play with a changing assortment of toys and receive extensive positive human interaction during grooming, exams, and trips to the playroom. They stay with the people they know who have been caring for them for years and they are comfortable for the duration of their lives.

All that said, **bunnies past their scientific utility should have the option of being adopted out** and moving on to a home outside of the vivarium when they can no longer serve the research mission.

- An adoption process would be **beneficial to the animals**, facilitating a comfortable retirement for research animals that have completed their service.

- An adoption process would **improve the EPA's public image**, assuring interested stakeholders that EPA was ensuring quality lives for our animals even beyond their period of service and that we weren't simply killing them for convenience or cost savings.
- An adoption process also makes **financial sense**, shifting the cost of care for animals that can no longer serve the Agency mission off the government.
- An adoption program would serve the interests of **more than the just the rabbits**, providing long term living solutions for other mammals and even populations of fish.
- An adoption process would **ease the emotional burden on research and animal care personnel** by limiting the need to euthanize healthy animals when they are no longer of service.
- The RTP animal care and use program already has a pool of people who would like to adopt retired rabbits, rats and fish.

*DOD, VA, UNC-CH, State and many other government, commercial and local academic institutions have adoption programs.